

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

September 22nd, 1943

DEAR MEMBER,

The reception by Marshal Stalin of the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church and his consent to the election by the Bishops of a Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia and to the restoration of the Holy Synod are momentous events, both in their immediate effects on the position of religion in Russia and in the possibilities for the future which they open up to the imagination. They are the culmination of a change in policy that has been in progress for some years.

The disabilities to which religion has been subject in Russia since the establishment of the Soviet Republic are well known. The Churches enjoy freedom of worship in the sense that registered congregations of adult citizens may hold and attend services in church. But they must not propagate religious doctrine outside the congregation itself; religious instruction may not be given in any public or private educational institution. Only in the family can the young receive any religious instruction. No religious journals are permitted; there has been no reprinting of the Bible since 1927.

The State, on the other hand, has used all its resources to encourage anti-religious propaganda. The teaching of atheism in the schools is universal. No believer in religion can be a member of the Communist party. As recently as four years ago members of the party and of the Young Communist League were reminded that the performance of any religious rite would lead to their expulsion. It is required of scientists, in particular, that they must be professed atheists and that they should take an active part in the religious war. Believers have thus been excluded from all the higher offices in the State.

Even before Russia became involved in the war, however, the beginnings of a change in the attitude of the Government towards religion were discernible. These were of sufficient importance for Professor Timasheff, who has recently published a well-documented volume on *Religion in Soviet Russia*,¹ to devote to them a chapter entitled "The New Religious Policy." The new political constitution of 1936 abolished the disfranchisement of the clergy. More favourable judgments of Christianity and of its historical rôle began to appear even in the circles of the Militant Atheist League. Recognition was given in public statements to the fact that Christianity was opposed to racial and national discrimination, proclaimed the dignity of man and human equality, helped to establish monogamy and to abolish the cruel contests of the Roman amphitheatre, and taught the doctrine of neighbourly love and of fraternity in which the working classes believe. It was made clear that these statements did not imply any weakening

¹ Sheed and Ward, 6s.

of the conviction that religion was outmoded and must ultimately disappear, but only that Christianity was not necessarily the reactionary force it was often supposed to be, and that a more tolerant attitude towards it was desirable. Anti-religious propaganda, it was insisted must take greater care not to outrage or wound unnecessarily the feelings of believers. This was emphasized afresh in a recent broadcast by President Kalinin. Violators of these new instructions have been reprimanded and even punished. School text-books have been revised and passages offensive to religion excised. Restrictions have been imposed on blasphemous attacks on religion in theatres and cinemas.

Sunday was restored as the rest day. When atheist leaders demanded the choice of another day in the week, it was pointed out that the people in the villages insisted on observing Sunday, and that there could not be divergence between town and country.

These tendencies have been furthered by the war. The common struggle against a cruel invader has created bonds which have, at any rate for the time, transcended and mitigated religious oppositions. The Christians have vehemently espoused the national cause. On the Sunday after war broke out the Metropolitan Sergius celebrated a solemn liturgy in his cathedral in Moscow, at which prayers were offered for the victory of Soviet troops. He also sent a message to all the Churches, urging them to pray, work and fight for the defeat of the enemy. In May of the present year one of the chief speeches at an All-Slav Congress in Moscow was by the Metropolitan Nikolai of Kiev. His denunciations of the enemy of Christianity and of culture, and his report of the many millions of roubles contributed by the clergy and believers for war purposes were received with prolonged applause.

When we try to form a picture of the state of religion in Russia these recent more favourable tendencies must be seen against the background of the whole twenty-five years since the Revolution, and that period in turn has to be viewed in relation to the history of Russia as a whole.

It would be a grave mistake to minimize the significance of the determined effort through a quarter of a century to eradicate religion from the minds of the people, and to use for this purpose all the resources which science and technical invention have placed at the disposal of the modern State. In the whole of human history there is no precedent for a deliberate attempt of this nature to form a nation of atheists. We need to allow the full weight of this momentous historical fact to sink into our minds.

It would at the same time be a dangerous illusion to draw too sharp a contrast between an atheistic Russia and a supposedly Christian West. Russia as a whole is far from having ceased to be Christian. Russian traditional sentiment and Orthodox Christianity still exercise a strong hold over a large part of the population, and exert in innumerable ways an unconscious influence upon those who have rejected them. Yaroslavsky, the President of the Union of the Godless, estimated in 1937 that one-third of the adult population in the towns and two-third in the villages are still believers. Timasheff gives many instances in his book of widespread, and often effective, resistance to attempts to stamp

out religion. The atheism of Communism, on the other hand, is only the making explicit and aggressive of an attitude of practical atheism which has for long prevailed in large sections of Western society. The conflict between atheism and faith in God is the ultimate issue of human life, but we shall misunderstand it completely if we equate it with an opposition between Russia and the West.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the workings of the human mind are complex and dark, and that atheism, like other creeds, is not necessarily what it gives itself out to be. As M. Jacques Maritain, the Roman Catholic philosopher, has reminded us, the speculative rejection of God need not involve a practical refusal to order one's life in relation to God, even when He remains unknown. An atheist of good faith may, against his own apparent choice, really choose God as the true end of his life.

It has also to be remembered that the story is very far from having reached its end. No one outside Russia, nor even in Russia itself, can estimate the forces which are wrestling with one another in the Russian soul, or foretell what the outcome will be.

It is hardly possible to over-estimate the significance of the revival of interest, of which there is abundant evidence, in Russian culture and Russian history. Those who steep themselves in these cannot remain ignorant of the religious issues which life presents. It was reported recently by a correspondent in Russia that there is hardly a patriotic play or film in which some one does not pray or make the sign of the Cross.

Nor can we leave out of our reckoning the religious elements, however much concealed, in Russian Communism itself, whether they derive from the Russian soul formed by its long past or from the influence of Hebrew prophecy on the outlook of Marx. The conception, for example, which runs through Russian history of the Messianic mission of Russia is undoubtedly alive under secular forms in the activities and aspirations of the Communist Revolution. And as Sir John Maynard says in *The Russian Peasant and other Studies*,¹ which I am told by friends, and can well believe, is one of the best books about Russia, "the notion that there is a pattern somewhere stored up, to which it is desirable to make the life of man conform (such, for instance, as the pattern of the classless society) carries with it a conception of teleology which is, in essence, religious, and is hardly reconcilable with the materialistic doctrine that the deed comes first and the thought comes after."

Still less can one predict what may be born in the future from the terrific experiences through which the people of Russia have passed in the awful years of war. These represent a tale of suffering and an unsuspected power of endurance and capacity of achievement to which history can furnish few parallels.

It is too early to say how quickly or in what ways the new friendliness of the Government towards the Church will lead to a relaxation of the existing restrictions on religion. But even if their formal repeal is delayed, they may become less and less operative in practice. It is worth recalling that in our own history the enactment in the reign of

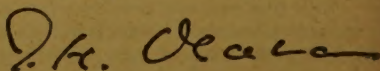
Henry IV relating to the burning of heretics remained on the statute books for several generations after the carrying of it out had become unthinkable.

When I said at the beginning that the recent happenings in Russia opened up to the imagination new vistas for the future, what I had in mind was this. The fundamental opposition between Christianity and Marxism is that the latter is a purely this-worldly system. It rests on the assumption that the fulfilment of man's life is found wholly in the temporal order. Christianity, on the other hand, finds the essential meaning of man's life in his relation to a transcendent God. But in spite of this fundamental opposition, Communism in Russia is derived in part from the deep insight of Marxism into the extent to which the individual is moulded by his social environment, and consequently alienated by fettering conditions from achieving his true self, and in part from the belief in the dignity and equality of all men and the moral passion for the regeneration of mankind, which are deep and characteristic strains in the Russian soul—truths which express a prophetic insight that belongs to the essence of Christianity. The most momentous issues for the future of mankind are involved in the question whether Christianity can reabsorb these truths into its own outlook and translate them into action. When we look beyond the power-politics which are likely to determine immediate policies in international relations, and which it would be unrealistic to ignore, we can see how the historical experiences of the Russian and Anglo-Saxon peoples have prepared them in different ways to make each its distinctive and necessary contribution to a true answer to the profoundest questions that concern the life of man. However little some of the chief actors in the events of this month may have been conscious of these possibilities, they may have been serving a destiny greater than they, or any of us, conceive or understand.

The new developments in the religious situation in Russia are a spur to strengthen every link of friendship between the Russian people and ourselves. It is good news that the Archbishop of York has received and accepted an invitation from the new Patriarch to visit Russia and is already in Moscow.

The writer of this week's Supplement is known personally to a number of our members and by name to many more ; but, in view of the position he holds, he prefers to remain anonymous, lest what he says should be supposed to implicate others besides himself.

Yours sincerely,



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THE CONTROL OF INSTINCT

A POST-WAR PROBLEM

MY DEAR JOE,

You may remember my asking you, earlier in the war, to persuade a psychologist to write a Supplement for you. Not long after that request was made, McCurdy's book, *The Structure of Morale*, appeared, a remarkable successor to Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, and those two books between them supply at any rate in part the need of which I was conscious. But now something rather different is wanted. We need someone to tell us what are the normal patterns of behaviour to be expected, not in war, but in armistice. What is the character which the ends of wars like this assume; or rather what are the normal "reactions" at such a time? The question is worth asking not merely that we may know what we are in for, but also because if the unconscious reasons for attitudes are brought into consciousness there is, I suppose, a better chance of our being able to modify them and to behave as reasonable beings. Unfortunately, I have no qualifications which entitle me to attempt to answer the questions I am going to put. I can only suggest a few of the historical analogies which occur to me, in the hope that someone who can make a proper job of the thing may undertake it.

BLOODY-MINDEDNESS

Total war such as this (and the blockade on both sides, with the occupation of Belgium and Northern France, made the war of 1914-18 almost "total," involving as it did the entire populations of many of the countries taking part) is generally said to end with a strong reaction from violence and from things military. This is only a half truth, isn't it?

With the losers there is an immediate reaction of that kind. You will remember the Greek historian describing how at the end of the Peloponnesian war (which, for reasons that it would be out of place here to analyse, was also a "total" war) the Athenians who had lost it pulled down their great fortifications according to the terms of the armistice, and how there was dancing and singing as if it was a festival. The constitution of Weimar, enacted after the last war, expressed a similar reaction in its anti-militaristic and in its supra-national attitude, and in its exaggerations of these very attitudes no doubt carried to some extent the seeds of its own failure.

It is equally clear, however, that the immediate mood of the winning side is not necessarily such a reaction. One constituent in the mood of 1918 in England was the determination to "squeeze Germany till the pips squeak." Enough people thought like that for long enough to make the difference. Absolute power corrupts absolutely; and there is a tremendous danger that the amassing of over-riding force should bring

with it what, saving your worship, I am going to call bloody-mindedness. The best description of this I know is in the "Melian Dialogue" of Thucydides. Thrasymachus' argument in the *Republic* that justice is the interests of the stronger is the philosophy of bloody-mindedness, and this attitude, characteristic of the Athenians in 416 at the height of Athens' power, passed to Sparta when Sparta was victorious, so that where the Athenians had chastised with whips the Spartans chastised with scorpions.

It seems that, unless we are forewarned, the mere possession of the weapons of physical violence breeds this, or rather is liable to breed it, if there is any awareness of competition or opposition, present or lately past. All the prayers that moved us so deeply, because they were prayed so sincerely, at the beginning of the war, about deserving victory and about our own part in the responsibility for war, will be so easily forgotten at the moment that it is won, because there will be in our hands this immense power to get what we want through physical violence. Then is the time that they must be remembered. In the last war the aberration was comparatively short-lived. But it was not without its share of responsibility for the loss of the peace, and it brought with it, for example, the "Black and Tan" period in Ireland. How can we avoid the onset of this madness, this bloody-mindedness, which is among the most horrible of the things we set out to fight? And how are we to use best the reaction that will inevitably occur in Germany?

May I here suggest a possible significance which heavy bombing may take in the re-education of Germany? It appears that indirect effects of war, such as hunger and disease, are forgotten, or not explicitly associated with their ultimate cause. With direct effects it is otherwise. This seems to be the lesson of what happened in France and Germany after the last war; and there seems good evidence that the actual recollection of the impact of war on Northern France, as much as any other single factor, made it impossible for France, with what was reputed to be the finest Army in Europe and the greatest military tradition, to fight in 1940. Though we know nothing as yet for certain of the long-term effects of bombing on its present gigantic scale, they may prove to be similar to the effects of devastation in France. If that were so, we would not need to write books and plays to prove to Germany that the use of force is a bad thing. Germany knows that now, and it is possible that for generations she will not forget it. Whatever may prove to be the truth about this, the only justification for bombing remains, of course, the military justification, and, fortunately, it looks as if the authorities had not yet been influenced by the cries for revenge: "Why should not Rome have a dose of it just as London had?" which are occasionally heard. That these cries for revenge would become deafening was the danger, but at the time of the dispute with Germany over the shackling of prisoners the country showed itself in no mood for reprisals, and we have, so far, escaped an outbreak of this brand of madness.

Is the reason for this escape, I wonder, that this country has also known the direct effects of war? Other explanations are possible. We have not had yet to face the huge casualty lists of 1916, 1917 and

1918. But it might have been expected that the "blitz" would make the demand for reprisals irresistible. On the contrary, the evidence that extensive bombing stirs up hatred against those carrying it out is, mercifully, far from conclusive. It seems rather that direct participation in the horrors of war in some ways steadies the judgment. The fire-eaters in the last war were not at the front, but at home. In this war I have heard more violent things said about "all Germans" in New York than in London. And it seemed during the blitz as if it came more naturally to the ordinary man to refer to the German by a pet name rather than by a term of abuse. He was Jerry, not the Hun, and in spite of what Dr. Goebbels has been saying about the undying hatred for Britain which is being inspired by our bombing, we may take comfort in the thought that it is at least equally possible that its objects are not the men who drop the bombs, but the men whose leadership brought Germany into war.

IMPERIALISM

One engaging feature of human nature is the tendency to attribute not only bad fortune, but good, to something outside ourselves—to a person, or more often to a system. Thus political opinion over certain issues which involve social privilege has varied in accordance with fluctuations of fortune in this war. When things were going badly, we believed instinctively that the rottenness of the old "system" was to blame, and we were for scrapping it—lock, stock and barrel. Manifestations of social privilege were attacked, and the power behind the attack lay in the parlous state to which, so we imagined, these things had brought us. Does it not seem likely that when things go well precisely the opposite will happen, and that we will start imagining, with equally little truth, that these very things have saved us? There seem already to be signs of such a reaction. What can be done to recover a more balanced judgment?

May I suggest an example of the way in which this tendency may be important? We might expect as a result of it a revival of what is known (since one must have a word so vague as to mean almost nothing) as imperialism. If we were ready for this, and were prepared to use it as the stimulus by which the voters in this country were induced to learn something about the empire and its problems and its needs, so that instead of indifference there was what you always call a "concern"—what an immense difference to the future of the colonies (the West Indies, for instance) that might make!

I have always believed, as you know, that we ought not to underestimate the psychological importance of drums and trumpets, and I do not believe that in politics pure reason can get what it determines to be best without making use of emotional appeal. The danger is that we should be satisfied with toy drums and tin trumpets, which would get us to the *Hitlerjugend*. We used to think in this democracy that, provided only the right people knew enough, provided only enough surveys had been made and enough reports written, all would be well. The surveys and reports multiplied as the sands of the sea. You wrote some of them.

So did I! But all was not well, and we find that we have to devise means of making people demand that what they think right should be done. In a democracy things will not get done unless enough people insist. Is the chance coming—the psychological “head of steam” so to say—when enough people will be excited by a vague imperial idea for us to get things done, if we can give it the right content?

RIFTS BETWEEN ALLIES

My last question is one about which, for obvious reasons, there is little public discussion. What is the psychology of the falling out between allies? We all remember what was being said by the soldiers and sailors at the end of the last war—the contrast drawn between the German who was a decent fellow and the Frenchman, who (we were told) had every sort of unpleasant habit and was morally despicable. Why does this happen? Hitler's propagandists do their work cunningly, as ours do also, pouring their handfuls of grit into the works of the Italo-German machine. But it is not only that. During the last war the Dominions rallied more generously to the help of the mother country than outside observers had believed possible. After the war there was some degree of antagonism, no doubt part of this same phenomenon. We may have the same thing happening after this war, on a more disastrous scale. It is beginning to be recognized that the anti-American stories being put about in this country and the anti-British stories being put about among the American forces are doing Hitler's job for him. But they are doing something worse even than to endanger ultimate victory. They may thwart the possibility of a reasonable peace. If we could get at the psychological roots of this evil, pull them up, shake the earth off them, and have a good look at them—well, then we might begin to feel some confidence that after this war the future would bring something different from that series of mistakes, blunders and calamities which the last armistice brought.

We can take confidence, too, from words that the Archbishop of Canterbury sometimes quotes, an inscription for a war memorial, an inscription devised by Mr. Churchill: “In war, constancy; in defeat, defiance; in victory, magnanimity; in peace, co-operation.” Each of these qualities is the opposite of what instinct might suggest. And it is the control of those blind instincts—the instinct not to be constant, but to do what happens to suit us at different moments in war; not to stand defiant, but to retreat in panic; not to be magnanimous, but to be arrogant; not to co-operate, but to rule—it is, I say, the control of those instincts which is our problem.

Yours ever,

W.

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